A Theory of Dark Network Design (Part Two): Type-I Dark Network: Opportunistic-Mechanical

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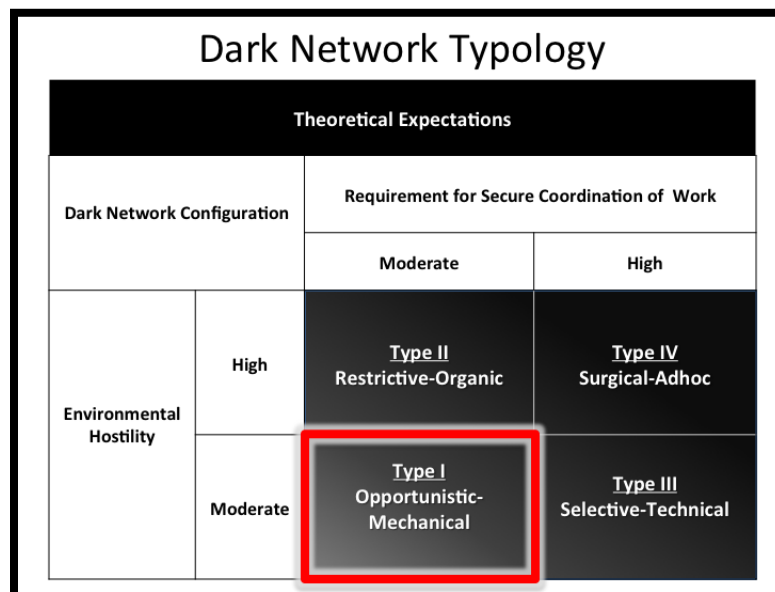

Figure One. Type-I Dark Network Quadrant

The purpose of this essay is to illustrate an example of a dark network whose design state is defined by moderate environmental hostility and a moderate requirement for secure coordination of work that yields what we call Type-I Opportunistic-Mechanical configuration. Based on our theory of dark network design, the example shows how an Opportunistic-Mechanical dark network is configured to achieve its purpose and how it is vulnerable to illumination and interdiction.

Type-I dark networks can include organized crime, gangs, mass radical movements, drug trafficking organizations, and paramilitary elements. For example, Russian Organized crime groups, such as *Солнцевская братва* (or the Solntsevskaya Brotherhood), conduct a variety of

illicit activities that include money laundering, prostitution, human trafficking and arms dealing.[1] This group operates through dozens of small cells at home and abroad.[2] Los Zetas, a Mexican drug cartel tied to a wide range of criminal activities, such as human trafficking, kidnapping and extortion, operates in a cell-like networked structure to limit information and remain agile in their environment.[3] One report states they are well armed and operate at a higher tactical level than local authorities, which gives them freedom of movement.[4]

For our illustration of a Type-I dark network configuration, we use the transnational gang Mara Salvatrucha-13 (MS-13). Although MS-13 has degrees of variation within the network, we selected it over the others because of its transnational nature; it most closely illustrates the typological design state of a Type-I dark network; and its prominence provides a rich collection of open-source information on the dark network.

Overview of Mara Salvatrucha-13

The transnational nature and expanding influence of MS-13 presents an increasing threat to U.S. national security and stability in the Western Hemisphere. In the early 1980s through the 1990s, over 2 million immigrants fled from civil wars that ravaged Central America and into the United States of America. Most of the immigrants fled from El Salvador and settled in the Los Angeles, California area. In the Los Angeles area alone, the Salvadoran population grew from 30,000 to 300,000; a vast majority of them, due to not being granted refugee or asylum status, were illegal aliens.[5] MS-13 reportedly originated in Los Angeles in the 1980s as a result of victimization of Salvadoran immigrants by local Hispanic gangs. The large number of Salvadoran immigrants banded together and formed the MS-13 gang as a means of protection.[6] Over time, the gang grew and evolved from a means of protecting the Salvadoran immigrants to participation in a variety of activities ranging from extortion to drug trafficking.[7]

As law enforcement cracked down and began deporting MS-13 members, the gang used the deportation to their advantage. First, the deportees set up MS-13 cells in their native country of El Salvador and expanded into Honduras and Guatemala. Second, the deported members found that Central America was a prime recruiting ground and began recruiting new members. These new recruits flooded into the United States to flee the law in their home country and others

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[1] Ramon J. Miro, "Organized Crime and Terrorist Activity in Mexico, 1999-2002", *Library of Congress Report* (February 2003), http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/OrgCrime_Mexico.pdf (accessed on November 29, 2010), 29.

[2] Ibid., 29. Also see Gretchen Peters, "Drug Trafficking in the Pacific Has a Distinct Russian Flavor," *San Francisco Chronicle,* 30 May 2001, http://articles.sfgate.com/2001-05-30/news/17600134_1_svesda-maru-russians-largest-cocaine-seizure (accessed on November 29, 2010).

[3] United States Congress, *Weak Bilateral Law Enforcement Presence at the U.S.-Mexico Border: Territorial Integrity and Safety Issues for American Citizens*, Joint Hearing of the 109th Congress, 1st Session, November 17, 2005, (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2006), 6–7; Michael Ware, "Los Zetas called Mexico's most dangerous drug cartel," *CNN.com/world*, http://www.cnn.com/209/WORLD/americas/08/06/mexico.drug.cartels/index.html (accessed on November 29, 2010).

[4] United States Congress, Weak Bilateral Law Enforcement, 6–7.

[5] Jessica M. Vaughan and Jon D. Feere, "Taking Back the Streets: ICE and Local Law Enforcement Target Immigrant Gangs," *Center for Immigration Studies Backgrounder* (October 2008), 5.

[6] Celinda Franco, "The MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs: Emerging Transnational Gang Threats?" *CRS Report for Congress*, January 22, 2010, http://opencrs.com/document/RL34233 (accessed on August 11, 2010); and Fred Burton, "Mara Salvatrucha: The New Face of Organized Crime?", http://www.stratfor.com/memberships/48568/mara_salvatrucha_new_face_organized_crime?ip_auth_redirect=1 (accessed on August 11, 2010).

[7] William J. Harness, "MS-13 Mara Salvatrucha", Conroe ISD Police Department Report (2006), http://police.conroeisd.net/Docs/MS%2013%20Gang.pdf (accessed April 11, 2010), 4.

joined their families on the "immigrant trail," which led to the establishment of cliques (geographically defined subgroups) throughout the United States.[8] Currently, MS-13 has active operations in 42 states and the District of Columbia with 6,000-10,000 members nationwide, in addition to operations in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala.[9] Other reports show activity in 48 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico—the only states showing no activity are South Dakota and Vermont.[10]

According to a report from the Congressional Research Service, street gangs are characterized as a first-generation, a second-generation, or a third-generation gang.[11] A first-generation gang is a traditional, turf-oriented and localized street gang. It is relatively unsophisticated, engages in criminal activities and tends towards a loose leadership structure. A second-generation gang is more organized and tends to "assume a market rather than a turf orientation."[12] While most urban gangs fit the description of a first or second-generation gang, there is evidence that MS-13 has some characteristics of a third-generation gang. A third-generation gang is characterized as a "highly sophisticated" and "mercenary-type group[s] with goals of power or financial acquisition and a set of fully evolved political aims."[13] Although MS-13 does not appear to have fully developed into a third-generation gang nor does it have known links to terrorist groups, some researchers assert that these types of gangs and terrorist groups share similar characteristics, such as "a propensity for indiscriminate violence, intimidation [and] coercion [that] transcend[s] borders, and target[s] nation-states."[14] Currently, MS-13 is a first-generation gang with elements of—and possibly evolving into—a third-generation gang. It characterized by the "opportunistic criminal activity and inter-gang rivalry"[15] of first-generation gangs and its cells also employ tactics characteristic of third-generation gangs.

Type-I Design State

Moderate Hostility of the Environment

The Type-I design state's level of hostility in the environment can vary. The groups in this design state are already at a medium level of hostility due to their intent to commit illicit activities. Moderate hostility of the environment results when the opposition elements lack the will and/or capacity to counter the dark network. The dark network and opposition elements then reach equilibrium where the opposition accepts a certain level of illegal activity by the dark network before committing or acquiring additional assets for interdiction. Beyond MS-13, another example of this type of network may be a radicalized faction of a legal light/bright network that conducts illegal activity in support of a similar purpose. For example, protesting abortion is not illegal, but Pro-Life activists who bomb clinics or perform crimes against medical practitioners who either perform or support the performance of abortion are performing illegal acts. These individuals and groups tend not to hide their affiliation and in some cases are

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[8] Harness, "MS-13," 4.
[9] From the FBI, http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/ms13_011408 (accessed on October 29, 2010).
[10] Vaughan and Feere, "Taking Back the Streets,", 1.
[11] Franco, "The MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs," 3.
[12] John P. Sullivan, "Transnational Gangs: The Impact of Third Generation Gangs in Central America," July 1, 2008; quoted in Franco, "MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs, 4.
[13] Franco, "The MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs," 4.
[14] Sullivan, "Transnational Gangs," in Franco, "MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs," 3–4.
[15] Franco, "The MS-13 and 18th Street Gangs," 3–4.

protected by their constitutional rights as long as they do not commit acts of violence. Once they conduct illegal activity, hostility becomes high for individual actors and the network as a whole.

This variance in environmental hostility is evident in our MS-13 example. Environmental hostility varies from clique to clique within the United States, mostly dependent upon level and frequency of crime and capability and/or priority level of local law enforcement. The hostility also varies transnationally. In El Salvador, local officials have adopted a hard-hitting approach called *Mano Dura* to combat the gang and are beginning to make it more difficult for MS-13 to carry out its operations. For this reason, MS-13 in El Salvador appears to be transitioning to a more hierarchical structure and adopting more secure measures to coordinate its activities.[16]

Moderate Requirement for Secure Coordination of Work

The moderate hostility in the environment also lends itself towards the moderate requirement for secure coordination of work to achieve the network's purpose. A Type-I configuration does not rely on a high degree of compartmentalization or clandestine communication to accomplish its tasks because it does not have to. The environment that a Type-I dark network operates, while not necessarily friendly, affords freedom of movement because the legitimate government may have neither the will, nor the capacity, to effectively combat dark network. Reduced security requirements make coordination of work less restrictive and more collaborative. The individuals and networks in this quadrant are can have meetings in the open, advertise their affiliations, and do not need to conceal their true identities.[17] Details of specific operations may be guarded, but their goals are not. In the case of MS-13, the gang does not conceal its goal of being the most violent gang in the world. It will use some measure of protection to prevent compromise of gang operations, such as using code words and/or utilizing the MS-13 alphabet in correspondence, but they do not hide the fact that they are drug traffickers, murderers, or kidnappers.

Type-I Dark Network: Opportunistic-Mechanical

We characterize Type-I dark networks as opportunistic and mechanical for the following reasons:

Opportunistic Action

The opportunistic nature of this dark network indicates a desire to make money, obtain and hold power, and follow the model of "any crime, any time" as long as it is profitable. Opportunistic action means to be involved in "a variety of criminal enterprises and is willing to commit almost any crime for monetary compensation."[18] For example, MS-13 is implicated in a

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[16] Clare Ribando, "Gangs in Central America," *CRS Report for Congress* (May 10, 2005), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS22141.pdf (accessed on November 29, 2010), 3–4. Also see Vaughan and Feere, "Taking Back the Streets."

[17] Gang members tend to adopt street names (pseudonyms) that become or their *nom de guerre*. Over time, gang members may only be known by their street name and create a de facto "cover" that makes illumination of the dark network problematic.

[18] Commonwealth of Virginia Department of State Police Virginia Fusion Center, "Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13) Intelligence Report," July 2008, http://info.publicintelligence.net/VFCMaraSalvatrucha.pdf (accessed on November 15, 2010), 4.

myriad of illicit activity, such as extortion, rape, drug trafficking, human trafficking, murder, theft, assault, prostitution throughout the United States and Central America.[19]

Mechanical Configuration

In a Mintzberg-sense, a mechanistic network resembles the diversified configuration—also known as a divisional or matrix form of organizational structure—that is selectively decentralized at the network level, centralized and authoritarian at the clique/cell level, and relies on the standardization of outputs to coordinate work and achieve the network's purpose.[20] Networks in this quadrant primarily operate in a decentralized manner, but recognize a system of relative power and authority and adhere to a strict set of norms promulgated by the strategic core of the directional component.[21] This recognized informal influence structure provides a framework for formal authority should the dark network decide to adopt a hierarchal form of organization as the situation permits.[22]

Although networks by definition do not have a formal hierarchy, governance does exist in varying degrees throughout the network by means of an informal power structure recognized by members of the network. This informal architecture of power and authority is based on respect and is guided by strict set of rules and norms.[23] This mechanical network does not have a single leader, but a virtual "big man" or directional nodes may emerge at various points in the network.[24] While cells within this network may have little to no communication with one another, each cell tends have central actors who are responsible for not only representing the interest of their respective cell or clique, but also maintaining the established norms of the network and achieving its purpose. In some cases, there may be more discernable structures or roles that exert greater influence based on an actor's centrality, power, or prestige in the network.[25] Reflecting on *The Advent of Netwar*, Arquilla and Ronfeldt's term "panarchy" best describes the aforementioned pseudo-hierarchy and how networks are able to selectively decentralize and standardize outputs through a strong purpose and set of established norms:[26]

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[19] List of MS-13 crimes compiled from FBI, ICE, and various law enforcement agency reports. For one source, see The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), "The MS-13 Threat: A National Threat Assessment", http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/ms13_011408 (accessed on August 11, 2010).

[20] Mintzberg, *Mintzberg on Management*, 153–172.

[21] Michael K. Carlile, *Into the Abyss: A Personal Journey into the World of Street Gangs*, April 7, 2010, http://people.missouristate.edu/MichaelCarlie (accessed November 5, 2010).

[22] In the unconventional warfare (UW) setting, an example of this evolution is when autonomous operational cells of the insurgent underground create the condition that they defeat the state security forces and become the de facto state. The relative hostility of the environment is moderate and there is a moderate requirement for secure coordination of work. Thus, they can assume an overt presence and grow and assume the duties and responsibilities as the legitimate authority. At this stage, these elements tend to adopt a recognized uniform and become the guerrilla elements of the insurgency and adopt a hierarchal form of organization. See Mark Grdovic, "SWCS PUB 09-1: A Leader's Handbook to Unconventional Warfare," *United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School*, November 2009, http://www.soc.mil/swcs/swmag/Assets/SWCS%20Publications/Leaders%20Guide%20Final.pdf and Department of the Army, "U.S. Army TRADOC G2 Handbook No.1: A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century," *Air War College Conflict 21 Terrorism Studies*, August 15, 2007, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army/guidterr/guidterr.pdf.

[23] See Mintzberg, *Mintzberg on Management*, 132–152.

[24] Dr. Anna Simons, "The Anthropology of Conflict" (lecture, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, October 6, 2010). A "big man" is an influential individual with no formal authority. His skills, possessions, wisdom, or another trait revered in a particular society, place him in a position of elevated status or recognition.

[25] Everton, *Tracking, Destabilizing, and Disrupting Dark*), 109–125, and Carlos A. Poveda, *The Likelihood of Collaboration Between Central American Transnational Gangs and Terrorist Organizations* (Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2007), 19.

[26] John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, "RAND Monograph Reports: The Advent of Netwar," *RAND Corporation*, 1996, http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR789/ (accessed November 5, 2009), 10.

Performance over time may depend on a powerful doctrine or ideology, or at least a strong set of common interests and objectives, that spans all nodes, and to which the members subscribe in a deep way. Such a doctrine can enable them to be "all of one mind" even if they are dispersed and devoted to different tasks. It can provide an ideational, strategic, and operational centrality that allows for tactical decentralization. It can set boundaries and provide guidelines for decisions and actions so that they do not have to resort to a hierarchy—'they know what they have to do.' That is why a nouveau term like panarchy may be more accurate than hierarchy.

When cliques within the network do not "do what they know they have to do," the directional elements of the network may exercise centralized authority on a selective basis in order to maintain the standards of the network. Once the crisis is resolved, the network will return to the selectively decentralized status quo. At the clique level, governance tends to be highly mechanical and authoritarian in nature based on the network's purpose and ideology. This loose construct of semi-autonomous cliques (cells) that are unified by a common purpose and an established set of norms enable the network to selectively decentralize for greater security. This arrangement provides a fail-safe that ensures the compromise of one cell will not impact the network as a whole. Likewise, the removal of a particular network cell leader does little to topple the entire network. Instead, it will allow for others to rise and assume control within the cell.
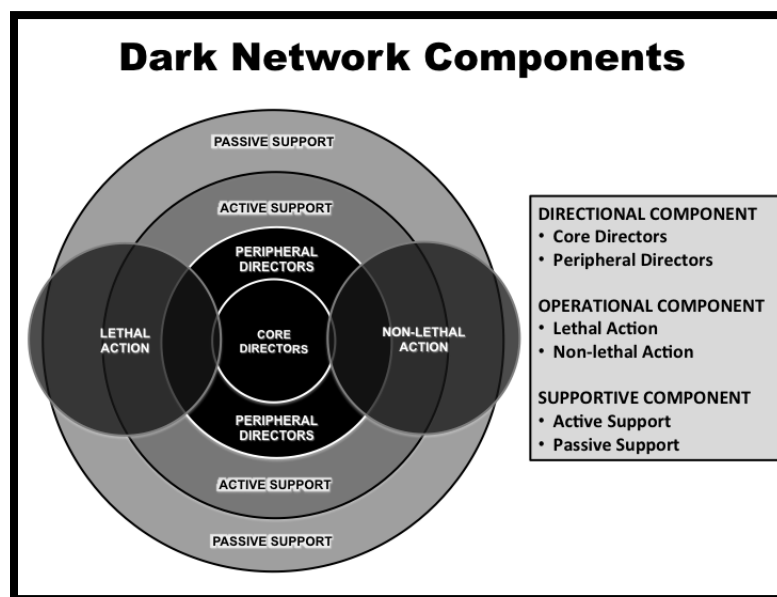
Fundamental Components

Figure Two. Illustration of Dark Network Components

Directional Component

MS-13 began as a local street gang, formed for protection, in the Hispanic barrios of Los Angeles and was not originally associated as a criminal organization. It existed to protect the safety of its members and members "held in high regard" served as the gang's decision makers. MS-13's purpose has evolved over time. The motto of Mara Salvatrucha is "Mata, Viola, Controla," or "Kill, Rape, Control." Despite originally forming to protect El Salvadoran

immigrants in the Los Angeles area from Mexican gangs, Mara Salvatrucha now strives to become and remain the most violent and most feared gang in the world.[27] Their crimes may vary from clique to clique, depending on location and direction from local gang leaders, but the overall purpose is to be violent and make money. Members of MS-13 have been convicted of crimes ranging from murder for hire to extortion to prostitution and rape. One account in the Northern Virginia area describes an extortion ring where the gang members tax the parents of young girls for "protection money" to ensure the young girls are not raped. While operating in loose-autonomous cells with little to no visible hierarchy, this continuity of purpose is maintained through the common desire to be the most feared gang. This attitude is fueled by media reports, documentaries, and the increase of Congressional Hearings on gang violence, where MS-13 is the headline gang of record.[28]

The network's configuration of loose, autonomous cells makes it resilient. Taking out a "leader" just activates a promotion system for emergent leaders. While there may be a lull in operations, the gang is not stopped and authority remains intact while the gang member serves his/her jail time. Interdiction does not result in catastrophic network disruption and deportation does not work. In one case, a MS-13 member was arrested in Suffolk County, Virginia, and New York on drug charges, was deported, and immediately returned to the United States and was subsequently arrested in Yuma, Arizona.[29] Similarly, another MS-13 member arrested in Santa Cruz, California in June 2010 had been deported three times in the previous eight years.[30] Further, deportation of undocumented MS-13 gang members has resulted in a networked, criminal diaspora throughout the Americas.[31] Arresting members of the directional component does not remove them from the network on a permanent basis.

MS-13 is organized into geographically defined subgroups, or "cliques", operating as loose, autonomous cells with the largest active concentrations in Los Angeles, CA, Washington D.C./Northern Virginia and New York City. It is widely believed that Los Angeles gang members have an elevated status among their MS-13 counterparts across the country.[32] In each setting, the gang's directional component *morphs* to fit the environment. While machete attacks might occur on the East Coast, they are rare on the West Coast. While car thefts and drug trafficking might be big in North Carolina, gang-on-gang violence predominates in Virginia. The decentralized nature of MS-13—with no clear hierarchy or structure at the network level—makes interdicting the gang as a transnational entity particularly challenging for law enforcement authorities. Law enforcement officials admit, "Taking out the heart of the leadership is very hard if there is no definitive leadership."[33] Unlike the hierarchal and formal structure of MS-13 in El Salvador, there is no clear indication of a formal command structure within the U.S. at the

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[27] *World's Most Dangerous Gang*. DVD. Produced by Andrew Tkach (2006), U.S.A. and Canada: Warner Home Video, 2006.
[28] Vaughan and Feere, 8. Also see "MS-13 and Counting: Gang Activity in Northern Virginia", Hearing before the Committee on Government Reform – House of Representatives, 109th Congress, 2nd Session, July 14, 2006, serial no. 109-174 and September 6, 2006, serial no. 109–182. Available at https://www.house.gov/reform.
[29] James Gilbert, "Yuma Border Patrol Agents Arrest MS-13 Gang Member," *Yuma Sun,* retrieved from http://www.yumasun.com/common/printer/view.php?db=yumasun&id=49993 (accessed on October 13, 2010).
[30] KSBW News "Suspected MS-13 Gang Leader Arrested in Santa Cruz," http://www.ksbw.com/news/23772715/detail.html (accessed December 1, 2010).
[31] John P. Sullivan and Samuel Logan, "MS-13 Leadership: Networks of Influence", *The Counter Terrorist,* August/September 2010, http://digital.ipprintservices.com/display_article.php?id=428186 (accessed on November 9, 2010).
[32] The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), "The MS-13 Threat: A National Threat Assessment", retrieved from http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/january/ms13_011408 (accessed on August 11, 2010).
[33] William J. Harness, "MS-13 Mara Salvatrucha", Conroe ISD Police Department Report (2006), http://police.conroeisd.net/Docs/MS%2013%20Gang.pdf (accessed on April 11, 2010), 4.

network level.[34] Despite this, there is evidence that smaller, junior cliques take cues from larger, more senior cliques—namely Los Angeles—and "whenever a more senior clique declares another gang as an enemy, all junior cliques follow suit and make the same declaration."[35] Some law enforcement agencies report increasing indications of contact and synchronization among the larger MS-13 chapters in Los Angeles, Washington D.C, Northern Virginia, New York City. This could be signaling an attempt to build a "national command structure" due to the expanding size of the gang and increased need for centralized control.[36]

At the clique level, the close geographic distribution of its members and permits a centralized, almost totalitarian form of governance. For example, cliques in Los Angeles have established an internal organizational structure with assigned functional roles and responsibilities. The U.S. Department of Justice states, "Several Los Angeles cliques have adopted a military-type organizational structure, appointing captains, lieutenants, and soldiers."[37] These larger chapters currently form the strategic leadership of MS-13, providing the overall purpose and direction of the gang. While there is no clear indication of direct control over the cliques, there is evidence of an "approval process in some kind of hierarchy beyond the clique" including cases where MS-13 leaders have sent "emissaries" to give direction to underperforming or "quieter" cliques.[38] John P. Sullivan and Samuel Logan best describe the MS-13 panarchy through what they call the "hierarchy of respect."[39]

In operational terms, the "hierarchy of respect" is expressed through a web of social relationships within individual cliques and social/business relationships between cliques. At the clique level, leadership is distributed. There are two primary leaders, the "first word" (*primera palabra*) and the "second word" (*segunda palabra*) who operate something like a commander and an executive officer in military settings. The *segunda palabra* from large, powerful cliques often exerts influence over smaller or subordinate cliques. In many facets, this leadership is neo-feudal, where leadership is determined by fealty to a leader who collects taxes and the support of warriors and in turn offers protection.

The loose-autonomous nature of the cells within the United States differs from the cliques in Central America. In El Salvador, the cliques are well organized and follow a formal command hierarchy.[40] We posit that this variation in organizational configuration between the U.S., that adopts a networked form of organization, and foreign elements of MS-13, that adopts a more formal form of organization, is a result of differing conditions of the external environment and the age of the cliques.

Operational Component

Within its operational component, MS-13 utilizes brutal violence (lethal decisive action), intimidation, and coercion (non-lethal decisive action) on rival gangs, the population, police,

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[34] Jessica M. Vaughan and Jon D. Feere, "Taking Back the Streets: ICE and Local Law Enforcement Target Immigrant Gangs," *Center for Immigration Studies Backgrounder* (October 2008), 9.
[35] Commonwealth of Virginia Department of State Police Virginia Fusion Center, "Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13) Intelligence Report," July 2008, http://info.publicintelligence.net/VFCMaraSalvatrucha.pdf (accessed on November 15, 2010), 5.
[36] Vaughan and Feere (2008), 9. Quoting Mr. Paul McNulty, the former U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia.
[37] United States Department of Justice, "Mara Salvatrucha," *Drugs and Crime Gang Profile*, November 2002, http://webzoom.freewebs.com/swnmia/mara.pdf (accessed on November 15, 2010).
[38] Vaughan and Feere, "Taking Back the Streets," 9–10.
[39] Sullivan and Logan, "MS-13 Leadership,"
[40] Commonwealth of Virginia Department of State Police Virginia Fusion Center, "Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13) Intelligence Report," 5.

government officials, and on its own members. As previously mentioned in the *Directional Component* section, each separate clique conducts the operations they feel fit their environment in order to make money and exert influence and control. If the environment allows for drug running and prostitution rings in Chicago, then that clique will exploit that opportunity. As the environment begins to turn more hostile, law enforcement cracking down on the drug trade for example, then the clique may move its area of operations or transition to another activity. The same holds true for adjusting the use of lethal and non-lethal decisive action. An MS-13 clique in Maryland was instructed by another, more established, local clique to do more killing by increasing their "output" to kill two rival gang members every 15 days. Realizing this would result in a crackdown by local police, the increase was overruled and the clique opted instead to increase its coercion and intimidation tactics.[41]

MS-13 is agile and is not as concerned with security in the sense that it does not hide its existence from law enforcement. In most regions, Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) are unable to respond effectively to the violence of the MS-13 cliques. MS-13 prefers quantity (killing rival gang members, controlling local drug industry or prostitution ring, etc) to security. Being arrested and either jailed or deported does not affect their "productivity." In regions where more security measures are required due to an increase in law enforcement capabilities, MS-13 has responded by using members who do not have visible tattoos and moving meetings to less obvious locations. In one area, the gang formed a soccer team so that they had a reason to meet in the open. They also employ very basic security measures to protect day-to-day operations and knowledge from outsiders. For example, MS-13 has its own slang as well as its own alphabet.[42] This security is not only performed outside the gang, it is also verified inside. It is not unheard of for a "credit check", which is a background to ascertain someone's standing within the MS-13 gang, to verify security within.

Depending on current environment, the gang adapts its level of violence or crime of choice. In some cases, operations are moved all together (but not stopped): "some attribute the rise in gang activity in Maryland to the success of the Regional Gang Task Force here in Virginia…instead of reducing gang activity, we are just spreading it around."[43] Agility of MS-13 is also enabled by a variety of other circumstances:[44]

The fluidity of our borders, insufficient immigration enforcement tools, a lack of social programs that promote youth development, the persistence of poverty, and a limited regional approach to law enforcement create the perfect storm for violent gangs to thrive.

As previously stated, MS-13 exerts control on both the population and the gang itself. Enforcement is brutal. We need to look no further than the gang's motto to know their methods of control include coercion and intimidation. Coercion and intimidation is used on both the population and the gang members themselves.

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[41] Testimony of Noe Cruz, in U.S. vs. Edgar Alberto Ayala and Oscar Ramos Velazques, quoted in Sam Logan and Ashley Morse, "MS-13 Organization and U.S. Response," February 2007, www.samuellogan.com (accessed on October 31, 2010).
[42] Commonwealth of Virginia Department of State Police Virginia Fusion Center, "Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13) Intelligence Report," 17-18. For example, the phrases such as "collecting rent" and "touch-up" mean "extortion money" and "non-lethal assault" respectively.
[43] Congressman C.A. "Dutch" Ruppersberger, in a statement made on his website, available at http://dutch.house.gov/2006/07/07-14-06-MS13Gang.shtml (accessed on November 6, 2010).
[44] Ibid.

Supportive Component

Law enforcement agencies incorrectly assume that Mara Salvatrucha's lack of a clear, formal hierarchy and its utilization of decentralized control equates to a lack of capacity. The network derives its support capacity through its members' desire to be affiliated with the gang and provides a wide base of active and passive support for the gang. Support is generated through coercion and intimidation, which is typically tied to the use, or implied use of lethal force.

Constant recruitment and a surprising level of sophistication of its supportive component provide MS-13 the infrastructure that is necessary to achieve its purpose. With an estimated 10,000 "hard-core" members in the U.S. alone, officials indicate that MS-13 is the "fastest-growing and most violent street gang in the United States."[45] The Center for Immigration Studies states, "Since its origin, MS-13 has evolved from a single turf gang into a networked organization comprised of individual 'cliques' that interact on the basis of social networks, influence, and opportunity".[46] Appealing to both poverty-ridden regions and at-risk youth, membership MS-13 offers both a job and a family. "The Maras offer a code, a family to members, many of whom come from broken homes or the streets."[47] The appeal of MS-13 generates its base of active and passive support.

There are many indications of both active and passive support for MS-13. Active support comes from families who were part of the original gang that formed in the 1980s, some of them raising their children and grandchildren to become MS-13 gang members, and employers who knowingly employ workers with known MS-13 ties.[48] Most gangsters do not make enough money to live the lifestyle full-time. According to a report from the Center for Immigration Studies, a town in Virginia discovered an MS-13 gang member working in an elementary school using false documents to obtain employment. It is assumed that many employers, family members and neighbors are "completely unwitting about [their] gang involvement" and even complain when arrests occur, "Everyone loves the guys during the day [for their labor] but it's at night when they cause me [and the police] all the problems," claimed one Virginia state trooper.[49]

A variety of people and institutions are passive support elements for the gang— sometimes unwittingly. A majority if MS-13 gang members (including those who are illegal aliens) work legitimate day jobs. The employers of these individuals are unwitting actors in the sustainment of MS-13. Additionally, the gang also uses the U.S. immigration and deportation processes to their advantage. The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) enabled Los Angeles law enforcement to crack down on MS-13 activity. The result was increased deportations. In some reports nearly 20,000 Central American criminals were deported from the United States from 2000 to 2004. Once these criminals returned to El Salvador, they discovered "fertile ground for recruitment" due to severe poverty,

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[45] Vaughan and Feere, "Taking Back the Streets," 4.
[46] Sullivan and Logan, "MS-13 Leadership."
[47] Jeremy McDermott, "Youths Flock to Massive El Salvadoran Gang that is their Only Chance of a 'Job'," *The Scotsman,* sec. International, April 13, 2004, http://thescotsman.scotsman/international.cfm?id=416482004&format=print (accessed April 2, 2010).
[48] *World's Most Dangerous Gang.* DVD. Produced by Andrew Tkach (2006), U.S.A. and Canada: Warner Home Video, 2006.
[49] Vaughan and Feere, 8. Also see "MS-13 and Counting: Gang Activity in Northern Virginia", Hearing before the Committee on Government Reform – House of Representatives, 109th Congress, 2nd Session, July 14, 2006, serial no. 109–174.

lack of economic opportunity, and limited capabilities of local law enforcement.[50] The large number of deported criminals extradited to El Salvador overwhelmed a government already focused on restoring order for thousands of refugees returning after the signing of the Chapultapec Accords.[51] While not the intention of the IIRIRA or other immigration laws, these policies enabled MS-13 to become a transnational gang. As these members were deported, either for their illegal immigrant status or for committing crimes as noncitizens, they returned to their home countries and began recruiting. This allowed gang to grow in popularity and plant roots throughout Central America. There are reports of MS-13 members being intentionally deported to gain intelligence on the new U.S. immigrations system and later disseminating their findings from prisons in Central America. The deportation process has turned into a sort of "merry-go-round" and in many cases a "taxpayer-financed visit with friends and family."[52]

The prisons in El Salvador have become "nerve centers" allowing for gang members from Los Angeles to communicate with members from cliques across the U.S. and Central America.[53] Even our own prison system has become a form of passive support. Prisons offered a "finishing school" for gang members where they learn criminal skills, later used to establish their illegal networks throughout the region.[54]

To maintain control, MS-13 has its own court system. The court enforces the norms set forth by the directional component and deals with non-compliance by issuing a "green light" that sanctions the use of lethal force to deal with those who do not comply with the directives of MS-13. For example, "the failure to pay the [protection] tax results in a green light allowing any affiliated gang to kill violators in jail, prison, or on the street."[55] This brutal enforcement mechanism allows the gang to ensure adherence to its "management vision" throughout the network. Similar control through coercion and intimidation is exercised on the local population.

MS-13 has its own "law enforcement" mechanisms by which underperforming or failing members face a "court" held by their peers. This court determines the appropriate punishment based on the offense of the member. According to one report, the punishment could be one of three options: a 13-second beating, a 26-second beating, or a 36-second beating. In cases where gang members cooperate with law enforcement, punishment by death is the clear option.[56]

Vulnerabilities and Conclusion

MS-13 is a good example of a Type-I dark network in the sense that it followed the basic principles of dark network design for its design state. It is well configured with the following exceptions. Specifically, MS-13 does not adequately address the principles of security, capacity, agility and resilience.

First, MS-13 violates the principle of security. In a network where membership is nearly unrestricted and the requirement for secure coordination of work is moderate, there are multiple

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[50] Vaughan and Feere, "Taking Back the Streets," 6.

[51] Embassy of El Salvador, "The Peace Accords," http://www.elsalvador.org/embajadas/eeuu/home.nsf/politics (accessed on October 23, 2010).

[52] Robert J. Lopez, Rich Connell and Chris Kraul, "Gang Uses Deportation to It's Advantage to Flourish in U.S.," *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 2005, local edition, http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-gang30oct30,0,6717943.story (accessed on October 31, 2010).

[53] Ibid.

[54] Sam Logan, Ben Bain and Kate Kairies, "Deportation Feeds a Cycle of Violence in Central America," *World Press*, March 31, 2006, http://www.worldpress.org/Americas/2304.cfm (accessed on July 11, 2010).

[55] Sullivan and Logan, "MS-13 Leadership

[56] See Vaughan and Feere (2008) and Harness (2006) for more examples of the MS-13 "court" system.

opportunities for interdiction. Since MS-13 is less concerned with security than rapid growth and conducting action, admission into the gang is not restricted. Once recruits are willing to be "jumped-in" and prove their loyalty, they are in. MS-13 includes multiple nationalities and cultural backgrounds.   If recruits can further the cause of MS-13, appealing to its reputation as the World's Most Dangerous Gang, they can join. This makes the gang vulnerable to penetration by not only law enforcement agencies, but also members of other dark networks, such as al-Qai'da or Hezbollah, that may seek to exploit MS-13's vast smuggling network to illegally enter the United States. If MS-13 is linked to terrorist organizations, then environmental hostility could increase exponentially.

MS-13 also violates the principle of security with their lack of concern over detection. This lack of concern stems from the fact that law enforcement efforts to combat them is not coordinated. This lack of coordination exists both within the United States and with the partner nations with MS-13 activity. The gang would be less resilient if faced with a more coordinated effort versus the limited regional approach that currently exists.

Second, MS-13 violates the principle of capacity. Many members are drawn to the gang merely due to lack of alternatives. MS-13 offers a code, structure, and a family to disaffected poverty stricken, directionless youth. Programs in Mecklenburg, VA have already shown progress in reducing gang membership in one of the largest MS-13 clique locations. An increase in such alternatives along with a coordinated effort across the United States and internationally (this includes reforms in the current deportation process which has proven to be more of a aid to the gang than a hindrance) could prove detrimental to further growth and success of MS-13.

Third, reports have begun surfacing that MS-13 may be attempting to create a national command structure across the United States. For a Type-I dark network configuration, this is a trade-off where exerting more centralized control results in the violation of the principle of agility. Becoming more centralized makes them less agile and more vulnerable to key target interdiction.

Finally, an inherent vulnerability lies in mechanical configuration of a dark network like MS-13. The loose-autonomous cells and decentralized action, while very adaptable and flexible for the network, also allow for simple misinformation to bring the network down. Since the geographically defined MS-13 cliques to not all communicate with each other, it is possible they may not even know who the big players in the larger cliques (Los Angeles and N. Virginia) are. Direction can be given to these smaller cliques to change action, change targets, or remove certain gangs from the "enemies" list in an effort to begin to reduce the levels of violence. A network with this configuration is highly susceptible to penetration and information operations.[57]

This essay illustrated a Type-I Dark Network configuration: Opportunistic-Mechanical through the depiction of Mara Salvatrucha 13. The opportunistic action and mechanical configuration allows this type of dark network to choose the most profitable crime for its given location while allowing for a directional configuration that allows each clique to operate as it sees fit in a given environment. The configuration allows for great freedom of action, but it also leaves the network highly susceptible to illumination and interdiction. It is the will and capacity of the regional law enforcement agencies as well as the lack of a coordinated effort that limit the successful interdiction of this type of dark network.

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[57] For more information on offensive information operations, see Edgar A. Jimenez, James S. McCullar and Kevin M. Trujillo, *Pseudo Operations and Deception in Irregular Conflict*, (Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2010).

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